

Dear Family and Friends of 2-8 IN

Wow! April has flown by and it is hard to believe it is already May. April was a tough month for the Warhorse Brigade. We lost friends and comrades and our hearts and prayers go out to the family members and units. Please keep all our Soldiers in your prayers, every bit helps.

The days are warming up and we have applied daylight saving time. It has been pleasantly mild and we have gotten quite a bit of rain. Our part of Iraq is very scenic with the green farms and the palm trees. From the air, you could mistake our area of operations for somewhere else. The canals keep the farms green, but they also restrict our movement. There are fine large houses everywhere, but they are interspersed with mud huts and dirt roads. Power lines are run haphazardly just about everywhere and, in our cities, you have to pull down your antennas to avoid robbing several families of their power line. Small markets are everywhere, the most prevalent are the roadside cola stands, much like a suped up kid's lemonade stand in the suburbs. Haswah has our longest market area and has stores ranging from the Iraqi version of AutoZone to the Arabic rug stores, all of which are about the size of a tobacco shop anywhere in the States.

The good news is our market areas are growing. Haswah market gets bigger it seems every time I go through it. Iskandariyah and Tounis are also "bustling". Our little town of Diyara continues to grow and is in for a boom as we push projects that way which will benefit numerous tribes. Our local Iraqi citizens are getting more involved in their own security. Many of the IEDs we find are a result of a tip from a local. And what is better, they are informing the Iraqi Police and Army.

We spend more and more time having meetings with sheiks and imams, and less time showing up at their homes, unannounced in the middle of the night. And we are having some meetings: agricultural meetings, business leader meetings, town hall meetings; our battalion leadership can't set foot outside the wire without a day planner because we all get hit up for meetings. This is a good thing. I know the PSD would rather patrol than take me to a meeting. A patrol is much more exciting and definitely more interesting than hearing me talk. Also, I suspect the PSD remains leery of the local fare to which I have become quite accustomed or possibly inured. Honestly, their food is outstanding. If you want to get by in Iraqi society at a meal, just eat what and how your interpreter does. At the end of the meal, make the "I'm full" motion and announce "BELAFIA". I have no idea what that means, probably some horrible admission of something involving a farm animal, but they always get a kick out of it.

Anyway, I digress. We spend a bit of time with the sheiks, and they are seeking us out. We spend time finding and talking to business leaders and local contractors and simple farmers, trying to get better ideas of how to tap into the one thing that can turn this country around. That is hope. They must have hope if they will succeed. Our security effort, our work with the local government, our position as arbiter for fairness, our investment in the Iraqi Army and Police is all about hope. They are a different culture, see things different, react in ways that surprise us, but they hope for the same things as we do for our families. They want to raise healthy children in a safe neighborhood who can go to a decent school so that one day they will have opportunities. Their hopes are no different than ours; but their conditions are. They have been fighting over table scraps

for the last 35 years and have forgotten how to prepare a new feast. They have lived in an environment of crooked government officials, crooked police, oppressive laws, and a reflex of “watch your back” so long they are slow to show some trust. And they are slow to dare to have hope. We are working on that, and there are none better at it than American Soldiers. American Soldiers are the best trained, best equipped and best led in the world. They are absolutely unstoppable in battle and unwavering in their commitment to success. These same Soldiers that are so capable and lethal are also the ones that upon seeing a poor farmer or pitiful child wonder what they can do to help. And they do it every day. They keep after it, making neighborhoods more secure, training their counterparts, setting the moral and ethical example and by being fair. Each day they bring a little more hope to the Iraqi people while holding off the terrorists who would steal that hope. One day the Iraqi people will succeed, but right now it is on us to offer them hope.

You can all be proud of your Soldiers. While the media omits the reports that would make you proud and only chooses the stories that cause concern and worry, you can be proud of them. I am.